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ABSTRACT

The impact of admission criteria to teacher education programs in Alabama and the impact of a recently established exit examination required for certification were examined. Current admission criteria included: (1) completion of 60 semester hours of the approved general studies program with a grade point average (GPA) of at least 1.2 on a 3.0 scale; (2) a minimum score of 70 on the Alabama English Language Proficiency Test; and (3) a minimum score of 16 on the American College Test (ACT). Students must also make formal written application, complete interviews with faculty, and have pre-professional laboratory experiences designed to aid in making career decisions. Certification depends upon successfully completing the program and passing the Alabama Initial Teacher Certification Test (AITCT) which includes a Basic Professional Studies Test (BP) and a Teaching Field Test (TF). An analysis of correlational relationships among ACT scores, GPA, and the BP and TF portions of the AITCT, based on a sample of 150 graduates, raised questions regarding reliance on a norm-referenced measure such as the ACT for making admission, retention, and certification decisions at any of the several decision points in the process of teacher education. (JD)

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# ACT SCORES AND SELECTIVE ADMISSIONS:

# AN EXPLORATORY LOOK AT SOME ONE-TIME DATA

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## ACT SCORES AND SELECTIVE ADMISSIONS: AN EXPLORATORY LOOK AT SOME ONE-TIME DATA

At its meetings on December 19, 1978 and May 8, 1979, the Alabama State Board of Education approved new standards governing the state's teacher certification processes. These new standards were published as Policies, Standards, and Procedures for Teacher Education and Certification, Bulletin 1979, No. 29, State of Alabama, Department of Education. Two significant components of this document involve criteria for admission to a teacher education program and exit from a teacher education program.

Under the requirements of the newly adopted standards, each teacher education institution must have clearly defined criteria for admitting students to a teacher education program and those criteria must include the following:

1. The student must make formal written application for admission to a teacher education program after the completion of 60 semester hours or 90 quarter hours of courses of which a minimum of 48 semester or ?? quarter hours are in an approved general studies program. The approved general studies program must include courses from traditional liberal arts areas such as the humanities, social sciences, natural and physical sciences, and mathematics, as well as three semester or four quarter hours in health and physical education.
2. The student must make a composite score of 16 or better on the American College Test (ACT). The student may take the test at any time prior to application for admission to a

teacher education program, but the ACT score submitted must not be more than five years old. The student may take the ACT as many times as necessary to achieve the minimum score of 16.

3. The student must have a minimum grade point average (GPA) of at least 1.2 on a 3.0 scale on all college work attempted.
4. The student must make a minimum score of 70 on the Alabama English Language Proficiency Test. This test consists of the following areas: expository writing skills, listening skills, reading comprehension, and language skills (e.g., grammar and vocabulary).
5. The student must satisfactorally complete interviews conducted by the faculty of the teacher education institution. The interviews are designed to provide information on the applicant's personality, interests, and aptitudes consistent with the requirements for successful teaching. The content and procedures of the interviews must be approved by the State Board of Education.
6. The student must have pre-professional experiences designed to assist him/her in making a wise career choice. Laboratory experiences in the schools must be a part of the process of selection and admission to a teacher education program.

After completion of the 60 semester or 90 quarter hour general studies program and formal admission to a teacher education program, the student must complete a professional studies program

which includes humanistic and behavioral studies, appropriate course work in a major or majors, appropriate methods of teaching courses, courses in curriculum, teaching, and media, courses in the evaluation of teaching and learning, and the internship (student teaching). The professional studies component is normally 72 semester or 108 quarter hours.

Upon completion of the general studies and professional studies programs, that is, the four year B.A. or B.S. degree program, the student may be granted Alabama Teacher Certification by successfully completing the Alabama Initial Teacher Certification Test (AITCT). This so called exit test consists of two parts: 1) the Basic Professional Studies Test (BP) which consists of content from the general education knowledge base, and 2) the Teaching Field Test (TF) which consists of content from the student's professional studies program (Elementary Education, specific Secondary Education majors, specific Special Education fields, etc.) Both the BP and TF parts of the AITCT are criterion-referenced and competency-based. The student must make a minimum score of 70 on both the BP and TF subtests in order to receive certification.

The implementation of the criteria for admission to teacher education programs and the first administrations of the exit examination (AITCT) have generated much discussion among persons interested in teacher education as well as providing new data for analysis and consideration. In the interest of assesing the impact of the criteria for admission to teacher education programs, particularly the minimum 16 ACT score, and the impact of the AITCT, exploratory analyses have been performed

using available score data for students in the College of Education, The University of Alabama. The results of these exploratory analyses are given below in the interest of making a contribution to the information base which should emerge as similar analyses are conducted throughout Alabama. It is hoped that such comparisons of teacher education program entry and exit data will have utilitarian value as appropriate decision makers review efforts to improve the quality of the education of persons seeking teacher certification.

The first two administrations of the AITCT occurred in June and August of 1981. From these two test administrations, the Alabama State Department of Education provided BP and TF subtest scores for each University of Alabama student who took the test. Utilizing university student records, data were secured for each student reporting AITCT scores. These university supplied data included GPA and ACT scores.

The correlational relationships among ACT scores, GPA, and BP and TF portions of the AITCT were analyzed. The analyses were based on the 150 students who took the BP portion of the AITCT and on the 82 students in the early childhood, elementary, or secondary education programs who took the TF component. The results are reported in Table 1.

The reported values on the several combinations of the four performance-related scores were not especially surprising or revealing. They seem to be generally consistent with reported relationships among such variables in the measurement literature. The strongest relationship was between the ACT and the TF test. The second strongest correlation was the BP and TF tests. As

might have been expected, the ACT score was more strongly related to the other two test scores, BP and TF, than was the cumulative GPA, a non-standardized test measure.

Table 1

Correlations Among Selected Variables

| | BP | TF |
|---|---|---|
| ACT | .48* (N=150) | .65* (N=82) |
| GPA | .45* (N=150) | .21* (N=82) |
| BP | | .62* (N=78) |

*p<.05; one-tailed test

A number of University of Alabama students who had been admitted to teacher education programs prior to the implementation of the minimum ACT score of 16 as an admissions criterion took the AITCT during the first two administrations. Due to the phasing in of the requirement of an ACT score standard, students in that group-admissions to teacher education programs with marginal ACT scores-represented a unique group for analyses. An exploratory look was taken at the subsequent performance on the BP and TF tests of these students categorized into two subgroups: those students with the marginal admissions score of 16 and a second group of students with less than 16 scores who would not now be admitted based upon that single criterion. The results of those analyses are presented in Table 2. The

percentages reflected in the table indicate that, in the admittedly small sample of students with marginal ACT scores, the subsequent performance rate was surprising. It might be noted in passing that the subsequent success percentages for students with an ACT score less than 16 (69% on the BP and 70% on the TF) are close to the 70% success rate which has been proposed to the Alabama State Board of Education as a minimum passing rate of students at an institution in order for that institution to maintain state accreditation of its teacher education programs.

Table 2

AITCT Performance of Students with Marginal ACT Scores

| ACT Performance | Basic Professional | | | Teaching Field | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | Passed | % | N | Passed | % |
| ACT = 16 | 12 | 7 | 58 | 6 | 6 | 100 |
| ACT < 16 | 23 | 16 | 69 | 10 | 7 | 70 |

What if anything, do these analyses suggest for consideration? As persons who have shuffled the IBM cards with ACT scores into admissable and non-admissable stacks and subsequently counseled with the students in the non-admissable category, they provide both reassuring and disturbing food for thought. The positive correlations among the performance measures considered in Table 1 allow a tentative conclusion that as standardized tests, the AITCT subtests seem to have similar measurement capabilities as the more established ACT instrument. The developers and users of the AITCT should find those results

somewhat reassuring. However, a disturbing element is introduced by the subsequent analyses of the AITCT performance of students with marginal ACT scores which were presented in Table 2. If the successful performance on the AITCT of graduating students is a validating measure of program performance, the ACT as a group standardized test used to make individual selection decisions missed the mark from a procedural perspective in 69% (BP) and 70% (TF) of the cases considered in this small sample of students.

One can only conjecture about the nature of such analyses should the data of this type be gathered from the several teacher preparations programs in Alabama. This small sample does raise a question in the emerging discussions regarding the reliance on any one single measure, especially a norm-referenced measure such as the ACT, for making selective admission, retention, and certification decisions at any of the several decisions points in the process of teacher preservice and inservice preparation.